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Docstar: Letter to my Former Self

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By Lt. Cmdr. Jason E Smith, MD, MC



Respect your superior officers, but even more your enlisted Sailors and Marines. These men and women are overworked, underpaid, and sacrifice more than you ever will to serve their country.

Dear Jason – or Docstar, as you like be called these days –

After 10 years of college, medical school, internship and [flight surgeon training](#), you've finally arrived in ... Yuma, Arizona. Why are you 150 miles from the ocean, and since when do Navy docs take care of Marines? Only since November 10, 1775, Docstar. And by the way, that is the birthday of the USMC, you probably want to know that one by heart.

Ten years have taught you how to be a competent physician, perhaps, but as you arrive at your first non-training billet; your military education is only just beginning. So to get you started off, here's some gouge:

- On gouge: "Gouge" means unofficial but noteworthy and important information.
- On responsibility: If the Skipper asks why something is not right or why you messed something up, or why you were late to a meeting, there is only one answer: "No excuse, sir. It won't happen again."



Taking care of the men and women who have volunteered and sacrificed to serve their country – is my calling.

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And be sure it never, ever, happens again.

- On the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program: If you take it with your enlisted instead of your ready room, you'll earn much respect. You'll also get the crap kicked out of you.

- On being a good aviation officer: Three legs to the naval aviator stool: good at flying, good at ground job, good comrade-in-arms. Two of three is the minimum, but to be really good, you need all three. Replace "flying" with "clinical medicine."

- On professionalism: Professionalism is how you act when no one's looking.

- On cheating: If you try to break the rules and apply a scopolamine patch before going for a BFM (Basic Fighter Maneuvers) flight, wash your hands before touching your right eye. With a blown pupil, you aren't fooling anyone.

- On FITREPs (Fitness Reports): When you have a 1 of 1 FITREP, a soft breakout in block 41 is your friend. I know you don't know what I'm talking about, but when the time comes, remember this. And by the way, as a lieutenant, your FITREP is due in January.

- On being a company man: Sign up for CHINFO (Chief of Naval Information) clips and complete JPME1 (Joint Professional Military Education). Really! You'll thank me later.

- On respect: Respect your superior officers, but even more your enlisted Sailors and Marines. These men and women are overworked, underpaid, and sacrifice more than you ever will to serve their country. If you are privileged enough to earn a salute from a junior Sailor or Marine, crisply return it.

- On being "The Doc": Go set your hair on fire with the ready room, but remember where you come from and your specific skill set. Be a professional at all times.



Three legs to the naval aviator stool: good at flying, good at job, good comrade-in-arms.

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Professionalism is how you act when no one's looking.

Docstar, when we joined the Navy, we thought it would be for four years; pay for med school, fly around in jets, travel the world, get out. But as you settle in to your first gun squadron, you will soon discover that this place, this mission, and this job – taking care of the men and women who have volunteered and sacrificed to serve their country – is your calling. It will take time to explain to Mom and Dad that you want to stay in. It will take time to understand it in your own heart. But understand that from today forward, physician is only half of your profession; officer in the United States Navy is the other.

Fair winds and following seas;

Docstar

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Jason E Smith, MD

LCDR, MC, USN

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